

CHAPTER 7: PUBLIC FACILITIES & SERVICES

Introduction

Public facilities and services play a vital role in the health, safety and general welfare of a community. Successful communities provide education, law enforcement, emergency, health and other services. Very successful communities provide these services efficiently and effectively while fairly distributing the cost burden to those who benefit, either directly or indirectly. Communities experiencing rapid growth and increasing demand for services while relying solely on property taxes for revenue generation will be less likely to provide those services efficiently and effectively. Many participants in the 2005-2006 scoping meetings held throughout Flathead County (see Appendix B: Public Involvement Summary) indicated a desire for increased levels of public facilities and services, such as more police officers and better schools. Setting goals for maintaining or increasing the level of services and facilities enjoyed by the residents of Flathead County, while exploring ways to fairly share the cost burden among those who use those services (such as visitors and part time residents), is appropriate for a growth policy.

Goal

- G.26 Provide cost effective solid waste collection, transport, and safe, environmentally responsible disposal to all communities.

Policies

- P.26.1 Create design criteria for new development to ensure the safe, efficient, and effective collection and disposal of solid waste. Require all new subdivision site plans to be reviewed by the solid waste district and/or private hauler.
- P.26.2 Encourage new subdivisions to establish centralized refuse and recycling collection sites within the development when curb-side pick-up is not feasible.
- P.26.3 Encourage new development to utilize contractor haul of refuse.
- P.26.4 Recommend solid waste containers in rural areas to utilize measures such as animal-proofing, and encourage public education on disposal methods to discourage the attraction of wildlife.
- P.26.5 Promote and encourage increased opportunities for community recycling through recycling pilot programs and the initiation of public-private partnerships.
- P.26.6 Encourage safe disposal of household hazardous wastes through education and collection programs.

- P.26.7 Ensure that programs for junk vehicle collection and disposal are available and encourage stricter enforcement of existing laws.
- P.26.8 Recommend impacts to the local community be mitigated at the time of construction, improvement, or consolidation of a green box collection facility by encouraging visual screening, safety improvements and dust mitigation measures.

Goal

- G.27 Safe, efficient and environmentally sound collection and disposal of solid waste.

Policies

- P.27.1 Encourage contract hauling in all new developments to reduce traffic and disposal burden at satellite container sites (green boxes).
- P.27.2 Perform a needs analysis to assess current and future levels of service to provide cost effective and efficient solid waste collection services within the County.
- P.27.3 Encourage county-wide recycling program(s) to reduce the rate at which the existing landfill approaches maximum capacity.
- P.27.4 Explore new funding mechanisms for continued solid waste disposal activities as well as future expansion.

Goal

- G.28 Efficient and effective waste water treatment and drinking water delivery.

Policies

- P.28.1 Encourage high density development in areas that will be served by community sewer systems that treat to municipal standards.
- P.28.2 Discourage development in areas not conducive to individual on-site sewage disposal systems because of flooding, ponding, seasonal high water tables, bedrock conditions, severe slope conditions or lack of access to a community sewage system.
- P.28.3 Prepare a comprehensive water quality management plan for the county.
- P.28.4 Initiate the development of a regional wastewater treatment plan.

- P.28.5 Work to engage water and sewer districts in the county development processes.
- P.28.6 Encourage wastewater treatment facilities and technologies adequate to meet or exceed water quality standards.
- P.28.7 Encourage land division served by public sewer facilities in areas of high groundwater as established by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality.

Goal

- G.29 Improve, protect, and maintain drinking water resources.

Policies

- P.29.1 Ensure developments comply with state regulations to provide evidence that drinking water of sufficient quantity and quality is available in areas of proposed development.
- P.29.2 Promote the installation of community sewer and/or water services in areas where the quantity and/or quality of drinking water resources are threatened.
- P.29.3 Identify wellhead protection areas for public wells and limit land uses in those areas to reduce the risk of drinking water contamination.
- P.29.4 Support land uses and subdivision activities that do not threaten drinking water sources.

Goal

- G.30 Safe and healthy individual wastewater treatment.

Policies

- P.30.1 Identify areas of higher susceptibility to impacts from septic systems due to soils, depth to groundwater, proximity to sensitive surface waters, topography, and/or density of development.
- P.30.2 Determine the feasibility of a countywide wastewater management plan for the maintenance and management of septic systems.
- P.30.3 Develop an educational brochure that explains the appropriate management of septic systems and the impacts associated with inadequate

management. Promote the document by distributing it to home owners and home buyers in Flathead County.

Goal

- G.31 Growth that does not place unreasonable burden on the ability of the school district to provide quality education.

Policies

- P.31.1 Consider a school district's ability to accommodate new students as part of the proposed subdivision review process.
- P.31.2 Consider the needs for future school building sites as development occurs.
- P.31.3 Determine common characteristics of developments most likely to add school children to the local schools and identify incentives for projects to mitigate impacts.
- P.31.4 Support multi-use of schools and parks as well as other community meeting places.

Goal

- G.32 Maintain consistently high level of fire, ambulance and emergency 911 response services in Flathead County as growth occurs.

Policies

- P.32.1 Require new subdivisions to have adequate on-site water capacity and recharge for fire protection.
- P.32.2 Support mutual aid agreements between rural and municipal fire districts.
- P.32.3 Recommend subdivisions located outside existing rural fire districts be annexed into the nearest district if possible.
- P.32.4 Ensure convenient access to and within all subdivisions for the largest emergency service vehicles.
- P.32.5 Encourage two or more subdivision access points in areas of high and extreme fire hazard.
- P.32.6 Encourage subdivisions to either mitigate the impacts of delayed ambulance response times or limit density of development in identified rural areas.

- P.32.7 Identify target level of service (LOS) for emergency 911 call processing and work to achieve and maintain that target as growth occurs. This should include security, survivability and redundancy of facilities and services.

Goal

- G.33 Maintain a consistently high level of law enforcement service in Flathead County as growth occurs.

Policies

- P.33.1 Create a seamless emergency response system through a regional 911 emergency response provider network.
- P.33.2 Attempt to increase the current ratio of patrol officers per 1,000 residents to meet the growing number of calls for assistance.
- P.33.3 Support crime prevention through planning and community design.
- P.33.4 Develop a comprehensive public response plan for sheriffs and fire districts to support growth and development in the county.

Goal

- G.34 Communicate growth issues with utility providers to address health, safety and welfare of the community.

Policies

- P.34.1 Add appropriate agencies to the referrals during the subdivision and zoning review process.
- P.34.2 Coordinate with utility providers for co-location easements to ensure adequate easement access to all current and future utilities at the time of final plat.
- P.34.3 Promote land use patterns that permit the logical, predictable and effective extension and integration of utilities.
- P.34.4 Establish standardized regulations for wireless and fiber optics communications infrastructure that ensure the following are maintained: public health, safety, general welfare, convenience, natural resources, and the visual environment/appearances.

PART 1: Solid Waste (see Goals 26 and 27)**Flathead County Solid Waste District**

Solid waste disposal services are provided by the Flathead County Solid Waste District. The District provides refuse collection, disposal services, hazardous waste collection, and recycling opportunities to all county residents. In 1969 the Flathead County Solid Waste District was created by Resolution No. 78. The district was created to meet the need for suitable areas and facilities to dispose of the refuse generated by county residents, commercial establishments and industries. The district boundary coincides with the county boundary and is governed by a board of seven appointed members. The district is enterprise funded, meaning that fees for disposing solid waste are used to fund all operations and activities. In Fiscal Year 2010 nearly 94,000 tons of refuse was disposed of by the district, compared to the approximately 116,000 tons of solid waste processed by the district in 2005.¹

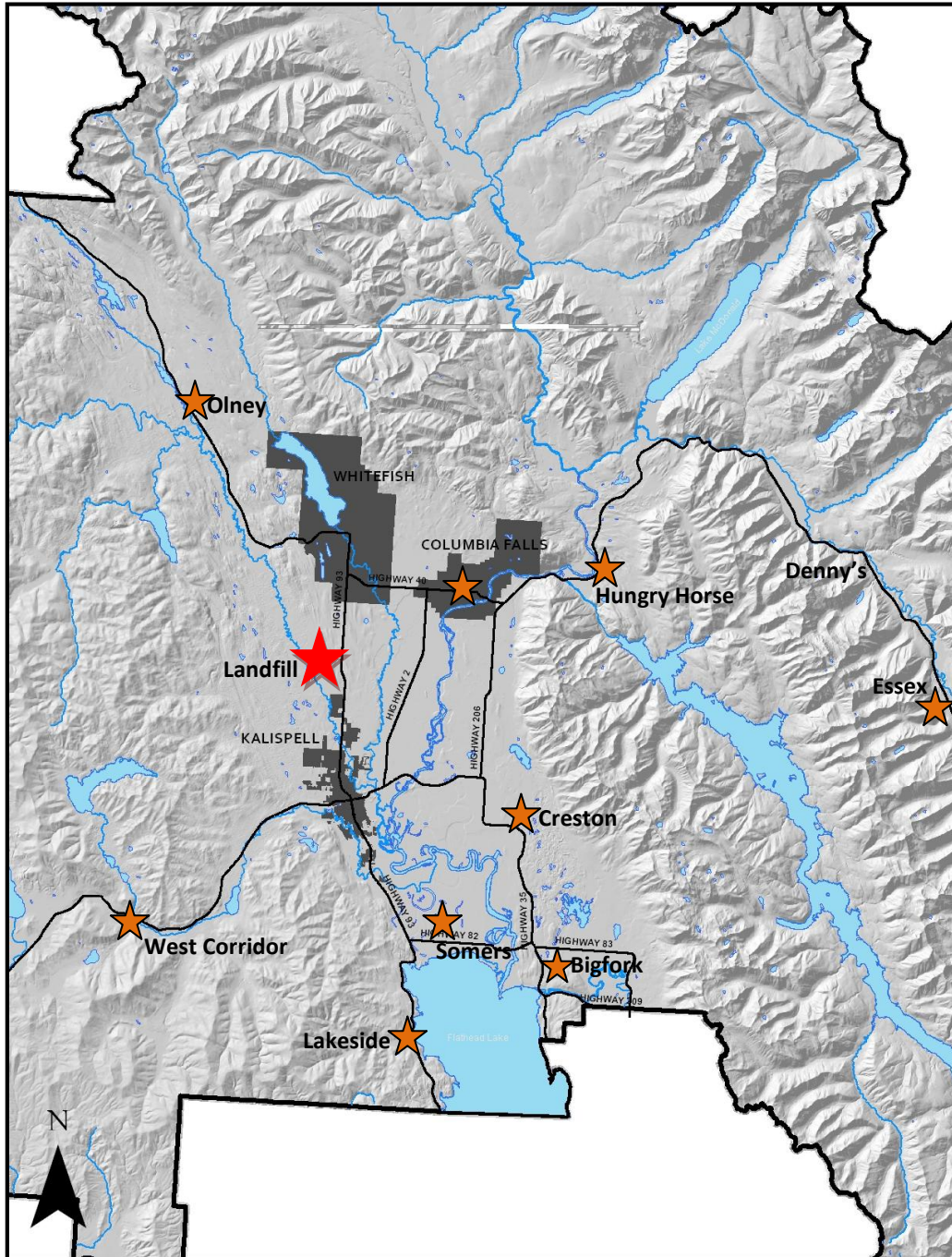
Facilities and programs

The Flathead County landfill is located five miles north of the city of Kalispell on US Highway 93. The landfill is permitted for waste management activities on approximately 80-acres, with a total of 275-acres dedicated for current and future waste management needs. The facility operates seven days a week and permits county residents to drop off waste at the county landfill or dispose of household refuse at one of 10 container or “green box” sites.

Container sites are located in the communities of Bigfork, Columbia Falls, Coram, Creston, Denny’s, Essex, Somers, Olney, Nyack, and Lakeside, as shown in Figure 7.1 below. The former green box sites in Marion and Kila were consolidated into one location known as the “West Corridor” site, approximately half-way between the two communities along U.S. Highway 2. Refuse accumulated at these sites is hauled by the district to the Flathead County landfill. As shown in Figure 7.2, waste travels to the landfill via the following four methods: individual private citizen haul, contracted private company haulers, municipal haulers, and green box disposal. Very similar to the figures provided in the 2005 Solid Waste Report, contracted private hauling companies are the most utilized method, followed by green box disposal, municipal haulers and individual private citizen haul.

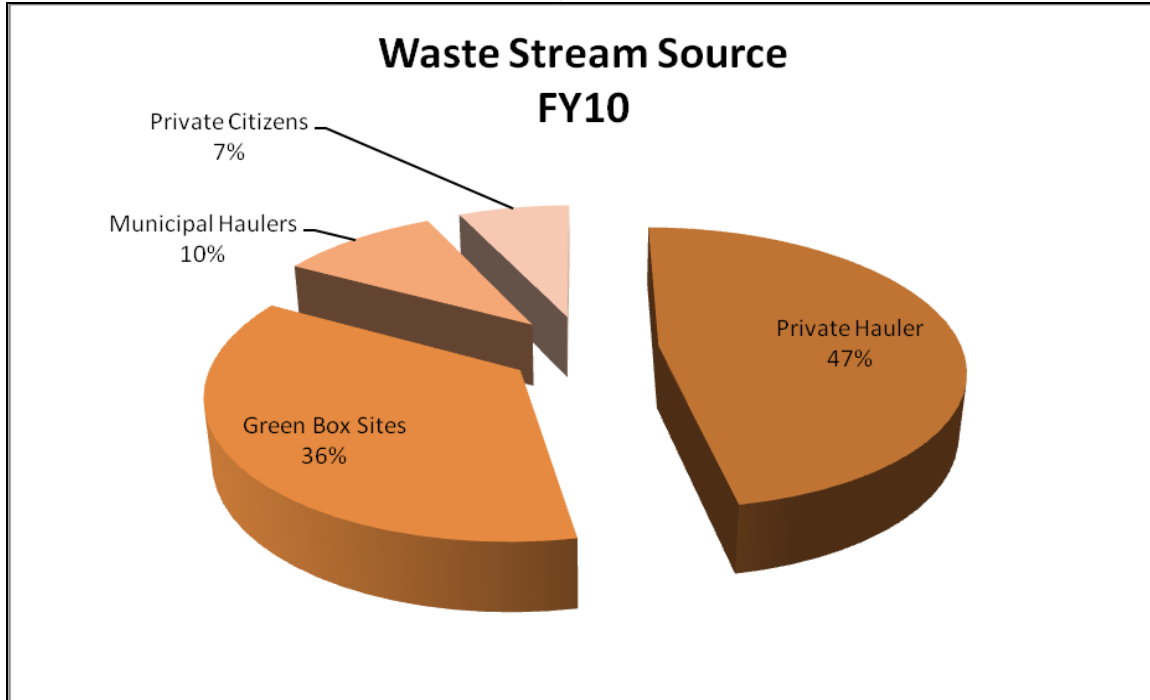
¹ Flathead County Solid Waste District 2010 Solid Waste Report, pp.17.

Figure 7.1
Flathead County “Greenbox” Sites



Source: Flathead County Solid Waste District; Flathead County GIS Department

Figure 7.2
Waste Stream Sources (Fiscal Year 2010)

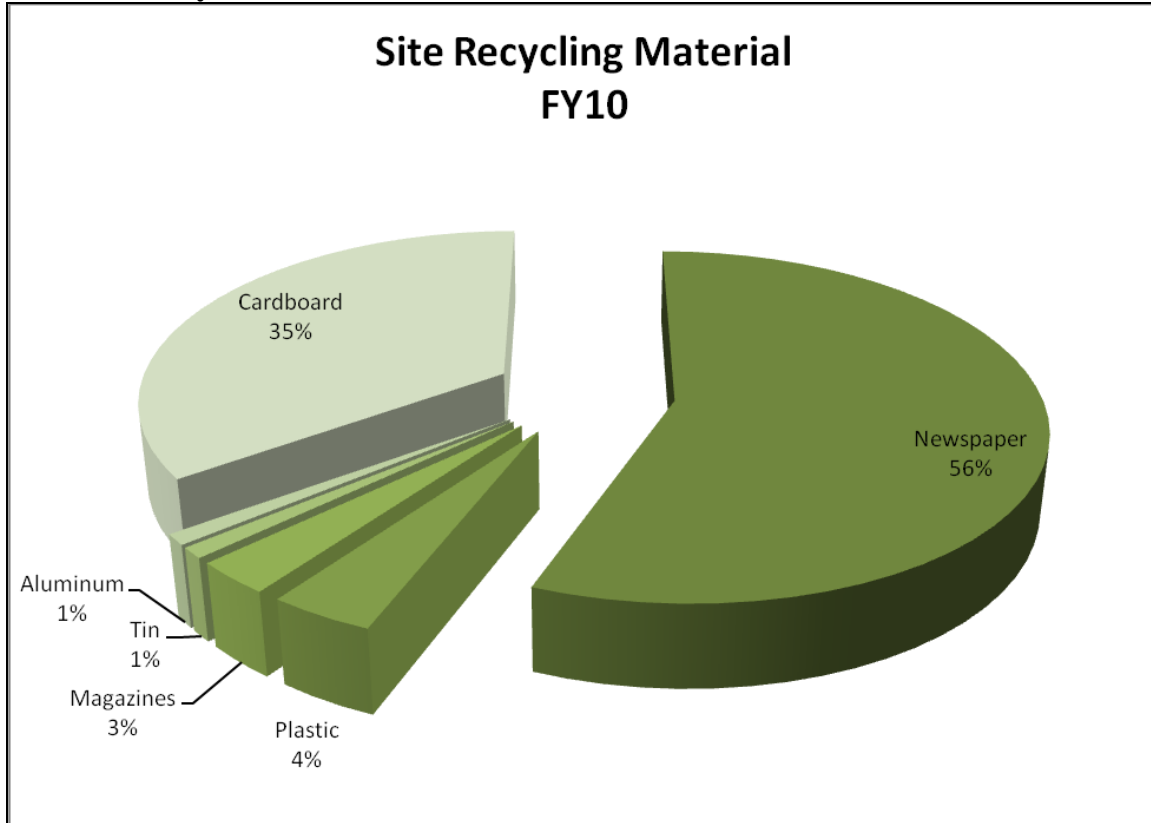


Source: 2010 Solid Waste Report, Flathead County Solid Waste District

Recycling

The Solid Waste District funds the county “WasteNot” consumer education program to increase awareness of solid waste issues with emphasis on recycling, waste reduction, and safe disposal of household hazardous waste. In the county, recycling programs provide opportunity to recycle cardboard, newspaper, tin, aluminum, and plastic bottles and milk jugs. Recycling containers are available at the Flathead County Landfill, and the Columbia Falls, Coram, Kila, Creston, Bigfork and Lakeside and Somers collection sites (see Figure 7.1 above). The District maintains a contract with Valley Recycling Center for the recycling of most household recyclable materials. As is shown in Figure 7.3, the most frequently recycled material is newspaper, followed by cardboard, plastics, magazines, tin and aluminum. Glass recycling is not currently offered by the District. In addition to commonly recycled household materials, lead batteries, used oil, paints, solvents, chemicals, pesticides/herbicides and fertilizers, as well as materials from appliances and junk vehicles may also be recycled.

Figure 7.3
Materials Recycled in 2010



Source: 2010 Solid Waste Report, Flathead County Solid Waste District

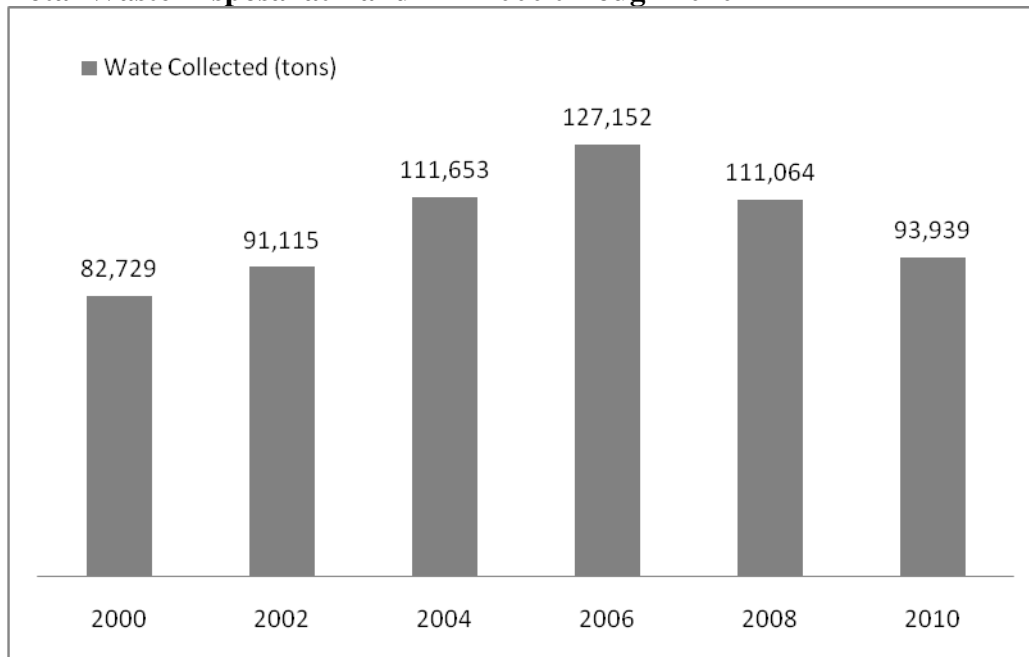
The Solid Waste District maintains a household hazardous waste program (HHW) that collected 3,386 gallons of household hazardous waste in 2010, a significant decrease over the 8,000 gallons of household hazardous waste collected in 2005. Residents can dispose of HHW at no cost while small businesses have the opportunity to dispose of HHW once a year for a fee. Household hazardous waste is collected every third Saturday of the month and transported to a hazardous waste facility where it is either recycled or disposed of properly. Much of the household hazardous waste in the county is not disposed of properly. The District estimates that Flathead County residents dispose of between 80 and 240 tons of hazardous products in their garbage on an annual basis.

As the County experienced high growth rates during the first half of the decade, the volume of waste collected and disposed of in the landfill grew accordingly. The District witnessed a 40% increase in tons of refused hauled from container sites between 2000 and 2005. The summer months tend to be the time when the largest volume of waste is disposed of, with a 500 ton per day disposal rate. The increase in waste disposal during the summer can be attributed to the influx of visitors and seasonal residents. The total amount of waste disposed of in 2005 equaled 115,779 tons, while current figures place the total amount of waste disposed of at the landfill at just under 94,000 tons². Figure 7.4

² 2005 Solid Waste Report, Flathead County Solid Waste District; 2010 Solid Waste Report, Flathead County Solid Waste District.

shows a steady increase in waste disposal between 2000 and 2007, followed by a steady decline over the past four years as a result of the downturn in the economy.

Figure 7.4
Total Waste Disposal at Landfill – 2000 through 2010



Source: 2009 Strategic Report for Flathead County Landfill

As a result of an overall trend in population growth over the past decade, the County has begun to experience the effects of increased waste collection and disposal needs. The increasing amount of refuse being collected from container sites has resulted in an increase in wildlife attraction to the container areas, including bears and large game. A visual degradation of the sites due to litter and lack of appropriate screening is another result. Illegal dumping of business wastes has increased also. The increase of individual households' hauling refuse to the landfill and to container sites has resulted in litter along transportation routes because refuse is improperly covered or secured, and because there is increased traffic congestion at the container sites and landfill.

Solid Waste Projections

In the spring of 2006 the Flathead County Solid Waste District acquired an additional 90 acres of land to the south of the current operating area (known as the South Area). This acreage was approved by the Montana DEQ as part of an expansion plan for the Flathead County Landfill. In addition to improvements made to the Creston and Columbia Falls container sites in 2005, the District has enlarged the Somers container site and consolidated the Kila and Marion container sites into the West Corridor site near Ashley Lake Road.

Of the 275-acre landfill area, 171 acres are dedicated (and permitted) for current and future waste disposal needs. In 2005 the landfill had a projected capacity of 29 years

assuming the increase in tons of waste disposed grew at an 8% annual rate. In that same year the projected capacity extended to a 57 year capacity if the tons of waste disposed grew at an annual rate of 2%. Based on the estimated capacity remaining as of July 2008, combined with current and projected inflow as well as diversion rates, the Flathead County Landfill is anticipated to reach capacity by 2055. Regardless of the changing growth rates, the county must continue to address ways to slow the increase of refuse growth, such as a more effective recycling program, and seek alternatives for the time when the landfill is full.

Given the growing increases in annual waste production, the landfill is a critical amenity for public health in the county. As the community grows adjacent to landfill operations, it is critical to maintain an understanding and application of compatible land use decision making. Land uses which are compatible to district operations (e.g. low intensity industrial and commercial, etc.) should be encouraged and uses not compatible discouraged (e.g. medium to high density residential).

Several waste disposal services not available from the District are provided by the private sector. Hauling of individual refuse is accomplished by private contractors, as well as tire disposal, Class III disposal of rock, dirt, concrete, clean wood and recycling facilities.

PART 2: Drinking Water and Wastewater Treatment (see Goals 28 through 30)

County Water and Sewer Districts

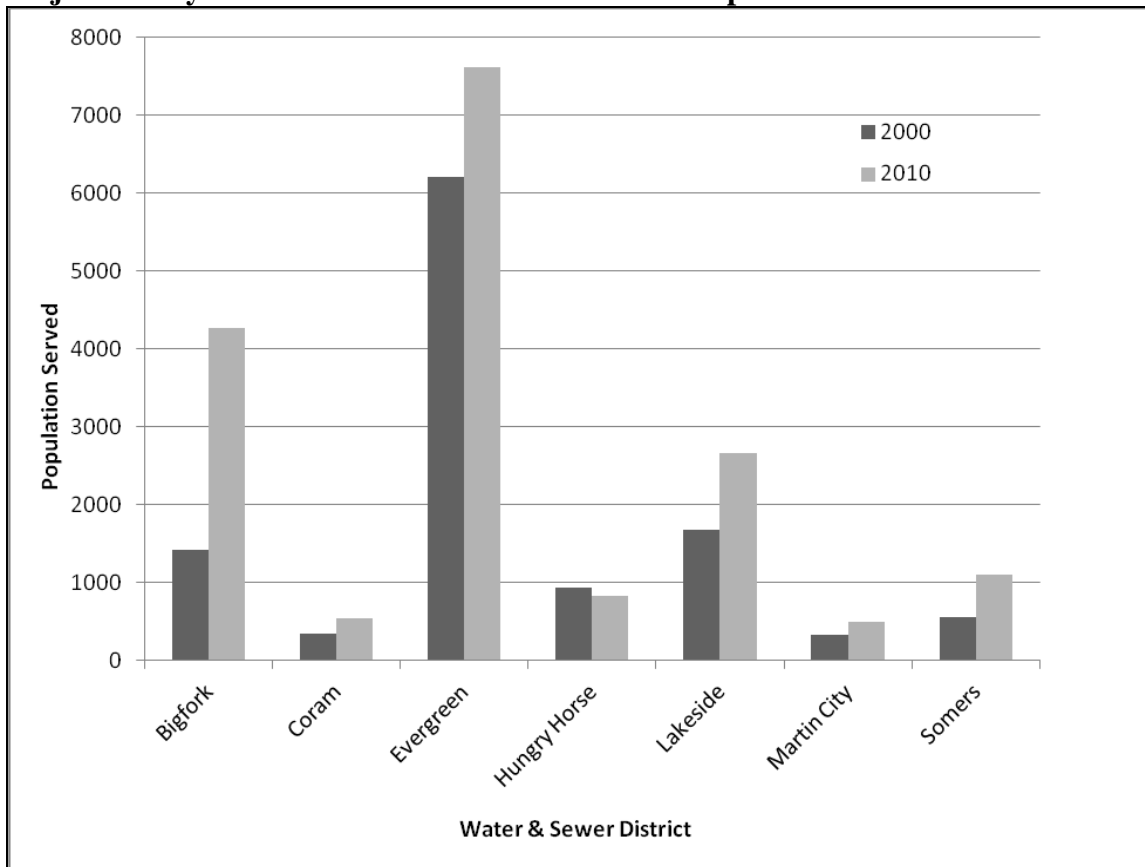
The majority of developments in the unincorporated areas of the county utilize individual septic systems and individual water wells to sustain development. Thirty-two Flathead County water and/or sewer districts have been established to serve larger scale development or rural communities. The ability to provide public sewer and/or public water services is a major factor influencing density and type of development in a community, as the necessary land area for septic systems and individual water wells is not a limiting factor. As these public services allow for higher densities, the public water systems can have hundreds to thousands of residents utilizing one or more wells. This makes protection of wellhead areas vital to limiting the risk of contamination to these public drinking water sources. Water and sewer districts, as they relate to the unincorporated areas of Flathead County are shown in Maps 7.1 and 7.2.

Existing Major Water and Sewer Districts

Seven major water and sewer districts, as seen in Figure 7.5, serve entire unincorporated communities, half of which provide both water and wastewater treatment services. These water and sewer districts in the communities of Bigfork, Coram, Evergreen, Hungry Horse, Lakeside, Martin City and Somers each serve between 500 and 8,000 residents and businesses. The Coram, Hungry Horse and Martin City Districts offer public water services only. No public sewer treatment is available. The Bigfork and Lakeside Districts operate their own sewer treatment facilities, while Somers contracts with Lakeside for

sewer treatment, and Evergreen contracts with the City of Kalispell for sewer treatment services. Bigfork, Lakeside and Somers each grew over 50% between 2000 and 2010, continuing the growth trend from the previous decade. For more on these individual sewer and water districts, including applicable DEQ reports, see Appendix A: Baseline Analysis.

Figure 7.5
Major County Water and Sewer Districts in Unincorporated Areas



Source: US Census Bureau Place Population Summary, 2000 and 2010

Existing Minor Water and Sewer Districts

The remaining 25 county water and wastewater treatment systems listed below serve large subdivision areas, not entire communities. Many smaller county water and sewer districts serve one or two large subdivisions and often provide only water services. These systems are often comprised of one or two wells providing drinking water, and several are serviced by a county or city sewer district.

- Big Mountain County Sewer District (sewer only)
- Cove Creek Ridge Water & Sewer
- Eagle Ridge Estates County Water and Sewer District
- Emerald Heights Water & Sewer
- Essex County Water and Sewer District

- Foy's Lakeside Estates County Water & Sewer District
- Fox Hill Estates Water & Sewer District
- Glacier Ranch County Water and Sewer District
- Green Tree Meadows HOA County Water and Sewer District
- Greenacres Water & Sewer District
- Happy Valley Water District, Areas A, and B (water only)
- Happy Valley Water & Sewer RSID (District #8)
- Kelsey County Water & Sewer District
- Lakeshore Heights County Water District
- Meadow Hills County Water and Sewer District
- Meadow Lake County Water and Sewer District
- Panoramic Mountain River Heights County Water District
- Pleasant View Homesites County Water and Sewer District
- Ranch County Water and Sewer District
- Smith Lake Vista County Water District
- Stillwater Estates County Water and Sewer District
- Stillwater Water & Sewer District
- South Happy Valley Water District, Area C (water only)
- Wapiti Acres Water and Sewer District
- Whitefish County Water & Sewer District

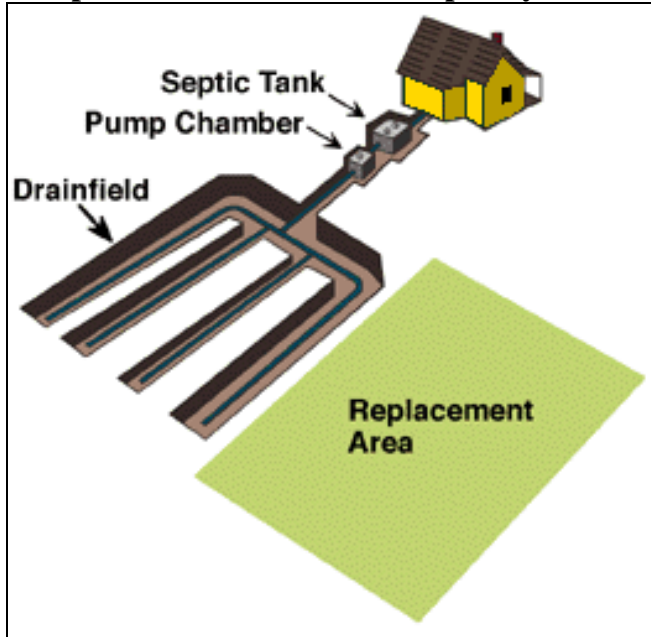
Septic Systems

Individual wastewater treatment technologies are utilized in a majority of the county because rural development is not often located within a water and sewer district; this is evidenced by Map 7.1. Several scenarios have arisen throughout the county as areas are witnessing increased growth.

- Waterfront communities, once characterized as seasonal, have begun to host year-round residents.
- Development has increased in rural communities and on the fringe of urban areas beyond the service area of public water and sewer.
- An increasing number of inadequately maintained and aging systems lie scattered in the rural areas.

Figure 7.6 shows a typical pressure septic system that contains five main components: a pipe from the home or business, a septic tank, a pump chamber, a drainfield and the soil. Microbes in the soil remove the majority of contaminants from the wastewater before it reaches the groundwater. Septic tanks are buried, watertight and hold wastewater long enough to allow solids to settle and oil and grease to float to the surface. The remaining wastewater is discharged into the drainfield and percolates through the soil, removing bacteria, viruses and nutrients.

Figure 7.6
Components of a Pressurized Septic System



Source: Washington State University
<http://cru.cahe.wsu.edu/CEPublications/eb1673/eb1673.html>

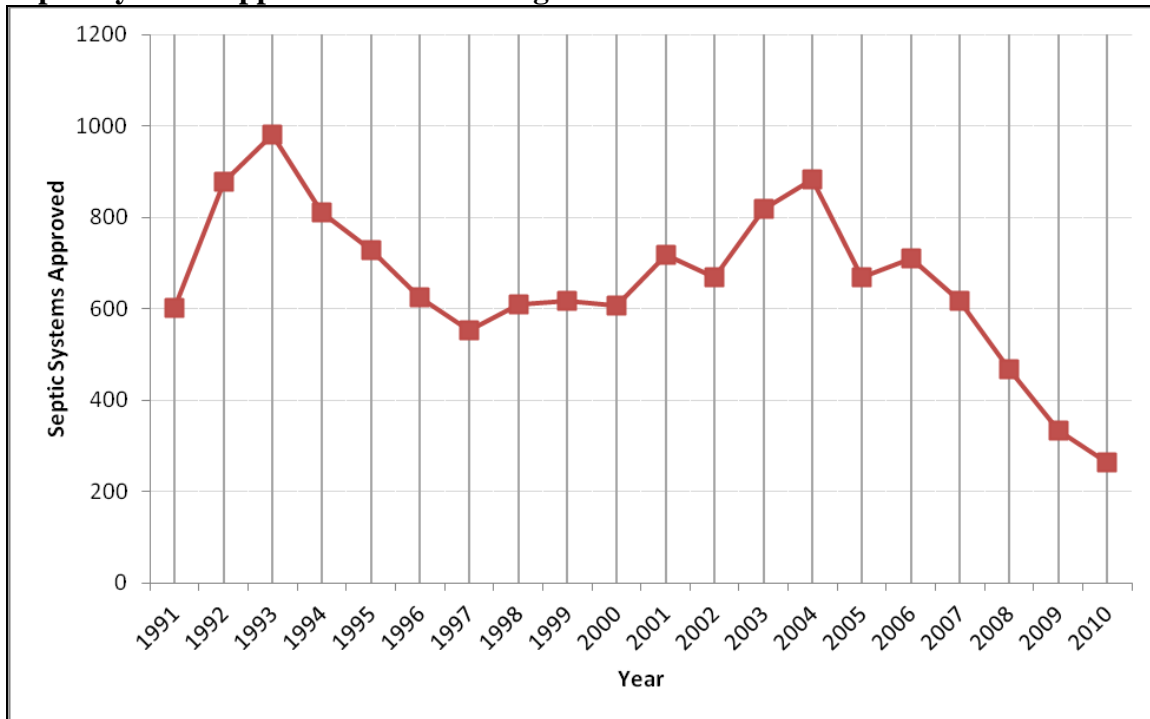
Alternative systems are appropriate in areas of less suitable soils, areas of increasing development, areas of high groundwater established by the DEQ or Flathead City-County Environmental Health Department, or near bodies of water. These systems can provide higher levels of pre and post treatment and can be modified to cater to specific wastewater treatment needs. The advanced systems incorporate a variety of technologies and are manufactured by a variety of companies. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency currently lists 27 alternative septic effluent treatment system technologies utilizing a variety of treatment methods³.

As the county population has increased over the years, notable growth in areas without public water and sewer systems has occurred. Map 7.1 displays existing septic system density throughout the county. Figure 7.7 shows the number of septic systems that received approval at final inspection by the county Department of Environmental Health from 1991 through 2010. Noticeable increases in the number of approved septic systems occurred in the mid-1990s as well as the early part of this decade; however, these increases were tempered by a significant drop in septic system approval beginning in 2004. Table 7.1 shows the number of septic systems that were approved annually between 2000 and 2010. Beginning in 2000 the number of septic systems approved on an annual basis increased dramatically, from just over 600 to 884 in 2004. While the number held steady until 2006-2007, a significant drop in permits has been observed over the last part of this decade. In 2010 only 265 septic system permits were issued by the Environmental Health Department, a -56% decrease over the past ten years. The

³ Onsite Septic Systems - Technology Fact Sheets, http://cfpub.epa.gov/owm/septic/septic.cfm?page_id=283

negative change in permit approvals correlates with the economic downturn experienced during the second half of the decade.

Figure 7.7
Septic Systems Approved – 1991 through 2010



Source: Flathead County Department of Environmental Health Services, 2010

Septic System Failure

Many new residents in rural areas are unaware of the location of their existing septic systems and are untrained in the proper maintenance of these systems. Septic systems that are inadequately maintained cause bacterial contamination of groundwater and recreational waters, algal growth in water bodies and wetlands, and ultimately impact public health. Improperly maintained systems contribute to major water quality problems, which creates concerns in rural areas characterized by relatively small lot sizes where residents are dependent on individual wells⁴.

Some of the reasons for septic system failure include when a system is overloaded with too much wastewater; when amenities that use large quantities of water such as hot tubs and swimming pools are connected to the system; affects from household toxics and cleaners as well as impacts from garbage disposals; improper design or installation and lack of proper maintenance⁵. After the failure of a septic system, nutrients may leach into the groundwater. Failed individual septic systems lead to a dramatic increase in the number of non-point source sources of water pollution discussed in chapter 8 of this

⁴ USEPA - Voluntary National Guidelines for Management of Onsite and Clustered (Decentralized) Wastewater Treatment Systems; March 2003. http://www.epa.gov/owm/septic/pubs/septic_guidelines.pdf

⁵ USEPA – A Homeowner’s Guide to Septic Systems; http://www.epa.gov/owm/septic/pubs/homeowner_guide_long.pdf

growth policy. In 1998 the Flathead County Health Department estimated that more than 50% of all individual septic systems in Flathead County were over 20 years old; this number will surely increase as the numerous systems approved and installed in the early 1990s reach the 20-year mark⁶. Flathead County and DEQ require a designated replacement area for all septic systems.

Community wide septic system management can assist in minimizing part of the impact of septic system use. Management should include public education, planning, design, construction, operation and maintenance, permitting, inspections and monitoring, reporting, and financial assistance and funding to ensure that individual septic systems are permitted in areas that pose no health threats, are constructed properly, and are routinely maintained. Proper maintenance conserves water, protects property values, preserves the tax base, keeps costs low for homeowners and protects public health, residents and the environment.

Projected Trends

As discussed in Chapter 3 - Demographics and Housing, population is expected to increase through the year 2030, although not at the rate once anticipated. With this increase population, the number of septic systems will likely increase in response to this growth. The extent to which development is directed to areas served by county water and sewer districts will dictate how much of the new development will utilize individual septic systems. As cities continue to grow and annex land, new and existing development may have access to public water and sewer utilities, eliminating some of the need for new septic systems in developing areas of the County.

PART 3: Education (see Goal 31)

Flathead County residents enjoy quality public and private educational options. In the public meetings held prior to writing this growth policy (see Appendix B: Public Involvement Summary), residents were asked what they would not change about living in Flathead County. Quotes such as “the quality of the schools in the area”, “high quality schools” and “our own children have excellent schooling” were prevalent. Maintaining the level of service for schools in Flathead County requires careful planning and consistent – if not additional – revenues.

Flathead County serves over 9,200 elementary students and 4,200 high school students in 19 public elementary school districts and 4 public high school districts. The county is also home to the Flathead Valley Community College, with a current enrollment of over 4,000 students. There are ten private elementary and four private high schools in Flathead County. Approximately 3% of school age children in Flathead County are home schooled.⁷

⁶ Critical Lands Status Report: The North Flathead Valley & The Flathead River Corridor, Flathead Lakers, 2002

⁷ County Statistical Report of Schools, 2010; Flathead County Superintendent of Schools Office

Enrollments have fluctuated drastically as the regional demographics of the county have changed. Canyon Elementary School in Hungry Horse was forced to close in June 2011 due to budget cuts and declining enrollment, shifting student attendance to Public School District #6 in Columbia Falls. Overall enrollment for public elementary schools in Flathead County has experienced a 5% increase over the past decade. Enrollment at private elementary schools had been on the increase during the first half of the decade (2000 through 2005) before experiencing a significant drop in enrollment between 2006 and 2010; overall, private elementary school enrollment has decreased 24% over the past ten years. Private high school enrollment suffered an even more significant decrease over the decade, with enrollment down 40% over ten years. Reference Table 7.1 for a summary of Flathead County school enrollment, as well as Appendix A: Baseline Analysis for detailed enrollment statistics.

Table 7.1
Flathead County School Enrollment

	2000	2005	2010	Change 2000-2010
Public Elementary	8,911	8,853	9,156	2.7%
Private, other and home elementary schools	1,345	1,361	1,070	-20.4%
Public High School	4,369	4,456	4,175	-4.4%
Private, other and home high schools	326	372	285	-12.6%
Flathead Valley Community College	1,614	1,914	4,087	30%
TOTALS	16,565	16,956	18,773	11%

Source: County Statistical Report of Schools, 2010; Flathead Valley Community College Enrollment (provided by Susie Birch, Director, October 6th, 2011)

Development patterns in Flathead County are generally reflected in school enrollments. As people move into high and medium density areas that are affordable to families with children, schools add students. This is evidenced by the increase in enrollment in the urbanized Kalispell District (up 20% over the decade) and the nearby West Valley Elementary District (up 42% over the decade). However, districts in less densely populated areas have also grown during this time period, including Cayuse Prairie, Olney/Bissell and Smith Valley. Schools likely to add students should be incorporated into the subdivision review process to familiarize both school districts and the public with health and safety issues of expanding enrollment. These communities should identify lands on which future schools could be built and plan ahead for acquisition. Such planning will save the taxpayers money and ensure schools are located in safe, logical and efficient locations with good access and space for children to safely recreate.

Schools can also boost a sense of community as many activities take place in and around schools. Well maintained, effective schools are sources of pride in a community and should be prioritized.

Areas of low density are usually not affordable to young families with children and school enrollment has declined over the past decade in areas such as Deer Park and West Glacier. However, some urban and suburban areas have experienced similar declines over the decade, including Bigfork, Columbia Falls, and Whitefish. Home schooling tends to be more prevalent in extreme rural areas where large tracts may still be affordable.

Population growth, coupled with increased per-student expenditures and facility needs, demand proper planning. Identifying future school lands, offering incentives to developers to mitigate impacts of additional students and asking school officials to be involved in the development process are valuable steps towards a safe and well-educated future.

Table 7.2
Per Student Expenditures, 2000 through 2010

	2000	2005	2010	Change (2000-2010)
Average Expenditure per Elementary Student	\$5,126.77	\$6,045.41	\$7,945.85	+55%
Average Expenditure per High School Student	\$6,018.30	\$6,777.89	\$9,278.01	+54.2%

Source: County Statistical Report of Schools, 2010

Flathead County offers education opportunities after high school. Flathead Valley Community College is a two year college that offers educational opportunities for advancement to a four year college, career enhancement and life long learning. A graduate of FVCC can obtain an Associate of Arts, Associate of Science in Nursing, Associate of Applied Science degrees, or a certificate in a variety of programs.

According to the FVCC economic impact fact sheet of November 2008, FVCC skills embodied in the present day workforce increase regional income in the FVCC service area economy by \$84.9 million. Altogether, the economy in the FVCC service area owes nearly \$113.5 million of its current labor and non-labor income to the past and present efforts of FVCC. This demonstrates FVCC as an engine of economic growth.⁸

⁸ Flathead Valley Community College Economic Impact Overview Fact Sheet; November 2008.

PART 4: Emergency Services and Facilities (see Goals 32 and 33)

The provision of fire, ambulance, law enforcement, and 911 services are the community services most directly related to the health, safety and welfare of the public. Accurately assessing the impact of growth on these services in Flathead County is critical, as the County relies heavily on volunteer fire and ambulance departments and operates under severe budget constraints. The size of the county itself directly impacts the ability to maintain an acceptable level of emergency services in the face of highly dispersed growth. Much more work should be done by the emergency services sector to assess capacity and gauge its ability to meet projected demands.

Emergency 911 Services

The role of public safety (911) communications in emergency services has changed significantly in the last 20 years. Cell phones have caused an enormous rise in the number of 911 calls, and difficulty in knowing the location of such emergencies has created the need for sophisticated location technology. Nearly half of all 911 calls are placed from cell phones. In addition, when the public dials 911, there is an expectation that the 911 dispatcher will provide help before responders arrive on scene. This has placed the dispatcher in the role of the “first” first responder. These and other expectations require emergency communications centers to acquire sophisticated equipment and advanced training for their staff. In Flathead County, these expectations have caused both municipal and county public safety agencies to support the construction of a fully consolidated 911 dispatch center for all responders in the county. Calls for emergency services are processed and multi-agency responses more easily coordinated through this center, which was finished in 2009 and is fully operational today. The number of calls for service continues to rise, as does the need for emergency medical services, likely due to the aging population in our county.

Fire Services

Fire response in Flathead County is covered by 19 separate fire departments, many of which are staffed solely by volunteers (see Map 7.3). Fire departments are primarily responsible for responding to fires and medical emergencies. Increased development has resulted in an increasingly high risk of fire in rural areas that are far from public services and facilities. On the opposite end of the spectrum, departments such as Evergreen are responsible for a high density area equivalent to the surrounding municipal departments of Kalispell, Columbia Falls, and Whitefish. In most cases the municipal and volunteer departments have mutual aid agreements to assist each other in the event of an emergency, providing better coverage to Valley residents. Citizens of Flathead County are fortunate to have excellent volunteer departments, although these departments are being stretched greatly in the face of increased development. For more information on individual fire districts and services, see Appendix A: Baseline Analysis.

Many rural departments may require additional facilities, equipment and staff resources in order to maintain current service levels. Response time to a fire location is critical and

must factor in the constraints of a volunteer staff. Response time includes travel time from a volunteer's home or place of employment to the fire station and then to the fire location. The maximum response time in combination with other variables determines the ISO (International Organization for Standardization) rating of a fire department or fire district. ISO ratings range from 1 – 10, with 1 being the best rating. ISO ratings are used by insurance companies to assess risk and base homeowner premiums accordingly. In Flathead County, ISO ratings generally range from 6 to 8. Keeping a good ISO rating is important to the fire chiefs and departments; consequently, the Flathead County volunteer fire department chiefs have an important role in directing future residential growth in ways that ensure public health and safety needs can be met.

Flathead County can assist by involving fire departments in the subdivision review process, through agency referrals and public discussion. Basic water supply requirements and safe access are two of the most obvious ways that subdivisions can proactively accommodate emergency services. Quick, convenient access to a substantial water supply should be made available on site. Cul-de-sacs should be avoided in fire hazard areas to avoid residents' being trapped due to limited ingress and egress. Road slope standards should be observed in all subdivisions, and legitimate secondary access should be secured or constructed whenever possible.

Ambulance Services

Ambulance services are limited in Flathead County due to the size of the county and the location of its population. Basic Life Support (BLS) is the first level of ambulance service and provides non invasive procedures to stabilize and revive patients; however, not all rural fire districts are licensed to provide BLS service. Advanced Life Support (ALS) is a higher level of service and includes administering drugs and establishing IVs. Transporting patients requires a state license and currently is performed by Kalispell, Whitefish, Evergreen, West Valley, Bigfork, Marion, Big Mountain and Fire Departments as well as the Lakeside Quick Response Unit, Olney Ambulance service, West Flathead EMS and Three Rivers EMS in Columbia Falls. The ALERT helicopter is both ALS and transport certified, and is designed to reduce response and transport times in rural areas of the county. The ALERT service responds to areas too distant for effective ambulance response or other areas in the county when requested. Map 7.4 shows the emergency response areas throughout Flathead County.

Growth in Flathead County creates many issues related to provision of emergency ambulance services. Development existing far from ambulance services creates a situation where those who are injured are more likely to die prior to reaching a hospital. To mitigate this situation, it would be reasonable to direct high density development in the county towards areas reasonably close to emergency services.

Law Enforcement

The Flathead County Sheriff's Department is responsible for protecting residents of the unincorporated areas of the county. Deputies are dedicated to protect the people of

Flathead County and the professional enforcement of local, state and federal laws. Currently, the Sheriff's Department employs 116 people. About 32% of this total, or 37 patrol officers, provide "on the ground" law enforcement; this number is slightly reduced from the number of patrol officers (48) employed in 2007. This is a ratio of .41 patrol officers per 1,000 residents. The remainder work as support, court or jail staff. The adult correctional facility employs 28 staff, and the juvenile facility employs 12. The juvenile facility is regulated by the State of Montana, and the ratio of staff to inmate is almost 1:1.

There are five divisions within the Sheriff's Department:

1. Adult Detention
2. Juvenile Detention
3. Detective Division
4. ANW Drug Task Force
5. Children's Advocacy Center

In 2000 the Sheriff's Office responded to about 22,400 calls for assistance. By 2005 the number of calls increased by 60% to 35,700, greater than a 10% increase each year. Because of the ratio of patrol officers to population the Sheriff's office has prioritized call responses. Crimes in progress or life threatening situations receive first priority response and immediate attention. Other calls for assistance are prioritized based on availability of officers and the nature of the call relative to higher priority calls received at the same time.

The Sheriff's Office operates three patrol shifts per day; these shift run from 0600-1600, 1500-0100 and 2000-0600. Each patrol deputy is assigned a patrol area within the unincorporated county, which is broken down into North, South, Local and Roving. Typically there are 6 patrol officers assigned per shift; based on the total area of the County, each deputy is responsible for approximately 848 square miles to patrol each day. During any 6-officer shift there are 9,991 residents per patrol office; this number is reduced during shift change when there is an overlap in officers, resulting in approximately 4,996 residents per patrol officer during these times.

Although the number of calls steadily increases each year the Sheriff's Office has been able to maintain a relatively constant time in responding. This is partly due to stationing patrol officers in the field who are available to provide assistance on request and where needed. Specialty teams made up of existing sworn officers including a Boat Patrol, , S.W.A.T. Team, Bicycle Patrol, and Alcohol Enforcement Team ts provide alternative means to respond more quickly to calls for assistance.

The Sheriff's Office oversees other public safety functions. The Sheriff's Office provides administrative and operational oversight for citizen volunteer activities and groups. About 200 citizens volunteer for the county's search and rescue activities, through the North Valley or Flathead Search and Rescue units or on the Nordic Ski Patrol. These volunteers provide specialty emergency functions and can be called on at any time to locate and provide medical assistance to the people lost and injured in the wildlands. There are 10 sworn deputy reserves who may be called to assist other officers

at organized events. The 55 person “Sheriff’s Posse” assists with crowd control, at election polling places and other county sponsored and community events. The value to the community generated by Sheriff Office volunteer groups can not be overstated or over valued.

Law Enforcement Projections

The number of calls for assistance and initiated officer responses has continued to outpace the rate of population growth in the county. In 2011 the Flathead County Sheriff’s Office received 30,333 calls for service. When contrasting the number of patrol officers to number of annual calls, each officer in the field responded to an average of 819 calls this year.

It is important that impacts of growth such as those referenced above are considered during the process of community development. Increasing population commonly increases crime, with more people living closer to one another and interacting more often. Improving and/or increasing the level of law enforcement services offered to residents of Flathead County is in the interest of all residents.

PART 5: Utility Services (see Goal 34)

County residents rely on many basic services such as utilities that help define their quality of life and maintain their health and well being. Utilities in Flathead County include natural gas, electricity, and telecommunication services such as cable, telephone and internet. These services are usually taken for granted, but coordination and conscientious planning for future growth must be established to assure service is uninterrupted and adequate.

Communications Media

There are currently several Internet service providers that service Flathead County. These include Bresnan (now Optimum), CenturyTel (now CenturyLink), MontanaSky and Mountain Max. Optimum offers cable service in addition to internet connections. Satellite and wireless services are also available through a variety of companies that operate locally and nationwide.

CenturyTel – now known as CenturyLink - is the third largest telecommunications company in the United States, and delivers advanced communications to Northwestern Montana. In 2010, CenturyLink employed over 270 Montanans and had 244,000 access lines active throughout the state.⁹ The company is a provider of residential and business communications in rural areas and urban cities in 37 states. CenturyLink offers a range of consumer services including broadband, television, voice and wireless communications. Additionally, CenturyLink offers data, voice and managed services for businesses, government and wholesale customers in local, national and select international markets

⁹ CenturyLink in Montana; <http://www.centurylink.com/static/Pages/AboutUs/FieldNews/Documents/montana.pdf>

through a high quality advanced fiber optic network and data centers. CenturyLink offers more fiber-optic bandwidth in Flathead County, per capita, than anywhere else in the Country, allowing residents and businesses more streamlined and reliable access to the internet. Beyond CenturyLink's fiber optic offerings, the Health Information Exchange of Montana is in the process of developing a 17,000 square mile fiber-optic network across rural northwest Montana, thanks to a \$13.6 million grant from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).¹⁰

Phone service is offered by CenturyLink, Optimum and AT&T. Optimum and AT&T do not have traditional land lines. Instead, the service is conducted over cable or the internet. In addition, there are several cellular companies in the Flathead Valley including AT&T, Cellular One and Verizon Wireless.

Electrical Service

Flathead Electric Cooperative, Inc. (FEC) is a locally owned and operated cooperative and is the only supplier of both commercial and residential power to Flathead County. Flathead Electric Coop is the second largest electric utility in Montana with nearly 48,000 members/customers. Over 3,800 miles of line serve the entire Flathead Valley and Libby, as well as several hundred members along the Montana-Wyoming border.

In 2004 the Co-op processed a record number of work orders and new services. Engineering released more than 2,700 jobs for construction taking in more than 125 new subdivisions. Underground cable replacement projects were completed in Desert Mountain, Kokanee Bend Subdivision, Rogers Lake Road and Peaceful Acres Subdivision. More than 416,000 feet of underground cable was installed, compared with 376,000 feet in 2003. Other projects completed in 2004 include U.S. Highway 93 from Four Corners to 13th Street in Kalispell, the Bigfork transmission rebuild, the Montana Avenue rebuild in Kalispell, design work for new substations in Lakeside and North Kalispell as well as a number of relocation projects related to highway construction. Replacement of standard electric meters with automated meter reading units continued, allowing the meters to be read electronically from the FEC office. More than 5,500 old standard meters were replaced with new automated meters in 2004.¹¹

The FEC Annual Report in 2010 paints a different picture, influenced by the economic downturn over the past three years and the slow in customer growth that has resulted. New member services anticipate a net increase of just 263 metered services between 2009 and 2010; this growth rate is significantly less than the historical long-term trend experienced by the company. Staffing levels have adjusted accordingly between 2007 and fiscal year 2010, and the amount of contract work has been reduced (with the exception of tree-trimming services).¹²

Natural Gas Service

¹⁰ Montana West Economic Development; <http://dobusinessinmontana.com/case-studies/broadband/>

¹¹ Flathead Electric Cooperative Annual Report 2004

¹² Flathead Electric Cooperative Annual Report 2010

Northwest Energy is the only major supplier of natural gas to the Flathead Valley. The company distributes natural gas to approximately 181,300 customers in 105 Montana communities, while also servicing smaller distribution companies that provide service to approximately 31,000 additional customers. Northwest Energy transmits natural gas statewide through a distribution system consisting of roughly 4,900 miles of underground pipeline.¹³ Pricing for natural gas is approved by the Montana Public Service Commission and is deregulated.

Utility Projections

As population increases, so will the demand for utility services. Availability of utilities plays a role in successful community development. Communications are a vital element in attracting new businesses to the county. For more on the importance of communications to a diverse economy, see Chapter 5 - *The Flathead Economy*. Public health and safety is affected by the location of utilities on developed property. A meeting with representatives of the major utility companies in 2004 revealed many concerns with development techniques that impact the provision of safe and convenient services now and in the future. Foremost was the issue of locating utility easements in new developments. Increased coordination between utility companies throughout the development process regarding locations of easements and locations of individual pipes and lines within easements would increase the safety of those working on the lines as well as the residents living nearby.

¹³ Northwestern Energy 2010 Annual Report

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